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Human progress and the environment at stake:

MCNAMARA CALLS FOR "MASSIVE GLOBAL EFFORT" TO CURB POPULATION GROWTH DURING THIS DECADE

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK - - A "massive global effort" to finance family planning programmes during the 1990s is urgently needed, according to Robert S. McNamara, a former president of the World Bank. Without it, population growth might destroy the environment and undo the economic and social gains of past decades, he said.

In a prepared text of a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) sponsored address, to be delivered at the United Nations on 10 December, McNamara said that projections now show that world population, currently 5.4 billion, could almost triple within 100 years, making rapid population growth one of the greatest barriers to economic and social progress and a grave danger to the environment.

He said it is in the interests of both developing and developed countries to take "immediate action to accelerate the reduction of population growth rates" during this decade and that "there is clear evidence this is possible and that the action can be undertaken within acceptable expenditure limits".

He estimated that this programme would cost approximately $US8 billion annually in public funds (in 1990 dollars) by the year 2000, with $3.5 billion coming from the developed countries and $4.5 billion from the developing countries.

Under the plan proposed by McNamara, each developing country would set a target for its population stabilization. McNamara proposed that the World Bank would organize the programme's

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external financing, and would serve as lender of last resort. UNFPA would monitor the programme, reporting to the UN Economic and Social Council, which would determine what other actions were needed to carry out the programme and reduce the "disgraceful levels of poverty so evident across the globe".

McNamara also called for the establishment of a "population commission", to help in the preparation of the planned 1994 International Conference on Population and Development.

McNamara's statement was delivered as the Third Rafael M. Salas Memorial Lecture. Rafael M. Salas (1928-1987), was the first executive director of the Population Fund.

McNamara cited the new, higher population projections by the World Bank that put the eventual size of world population at 12.4 billion. But population could also reach 14 billion a century from now, according to UN projections, he warned, up from the 1982 United Nations projection of 10.2 billion by 2085. At present, world population is growing at approximately 100 million people per year, with more than 90 per cent of that growth taking place in the developing world.

McMamara said that he first voiced his concern over population growth in 1968 and that, since then, more than 2 billion people have been added to the world. Despite this addition to world population, he said much progress has been achieved.

"There have been remarkable advances in economic and social welfare in the developing countries, where 80 per cent of the world's population lives. Consumption per capita has risen by almost 70 per cent, infant mortality rates have fallen, literacy rates have increased, average nutritional levels have improved and life expectancy has risen," he said.

Nevertheless, he warned, today more than a billion people are suffering from hunger; the number of illiterates has risen to 900 million; maternal mortality has increased; and infant and child mortality remain high.

Continued high rates of population growth "increase the danger that the present paths of economic development - in developing and developed countries alike - are unsustainable and risk the destruction of the earth's physical environment," he added.

"Both developed and developing countries must put primary emphasis on raising production per capita, if they are to meet the demands of their people for a better life. 'Economic growth' must continue if the quality of life is to improve for the billions of poor across the globe. For decades ahead, no other course will be acceptable," he said.

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If per capita consumption were to grow in the future at only 2 per cent per year, "it would double in 35 years, quadruple in 70 years, and by the end of the next century would be 8 times greater than today," he said.

The greatest effect on the environment in the future will be the product of both population levels and consumption per capita. Given a 14 billion population, an eight-fold increase in consumption per capita would mean a 20-time greater global production and an equally large impact on non-renewable and renewable resources which could not be sustained, McNamara said.

"Environmental damage per unit of production can, and will, be cut drastically", he said, but the impact of such huge population growth on basic resources and "ecosystems such as land and water, forests, photosynthesis and climate is far more difficult to appraise".

He said that many biologists are now starting to emphasize that there are limits to the numbers of people the globe can support, but no one knows exactly what those limits are.

"Within the past decade, four global environmental phenomena have surfaced: the loss of bio-diversity, acid rain, destruction of the ozone layer and climate change. All are a function of rising population levels and increasing consumption per capita", McNamara said.

Advances in technology will reduce resource use in relation to production, he said, "but we have no assurance that the globe can tolerate production increases of anything approaching the magnitude I have hypothesized", he added.

"Even if the ultimate 'carrying capacity' of the earth could support a global population and a total global output of the size I have discussed," he said, "it is highly unlikely that the technical, institutional and political changes would occur fast enough, and evenly enough across regions, to meet the output requirements during the intervening years".

McNamara also called for discussions on how the developed countries, which consume seven times as much per capita as developing countries, could reduce their consumption patterns and help "assure a sustainable path of development for all the inhabitants of our planet". To do less, he said, would be "neither morally defensible nor politically acceptable".

He said that to achieve sustainable development - economic and social progress that does not destroy the environment - "we must begin now to identify and introduce the changes necessary to achieve it, if we are to avoid more precipitate and costly action in the future".

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One of the changes "that would enhance the prospect for sustainable development in almost all developing countries would be a reduction in prospective population growth rates". Sustainable development would also help alleviate the growing number of those living in poverty and the almost 1 billion living in "absolute poverty", he said.

High fertility countries face a doubling or tripling of their school-age population within a decade or two which is reducing the "already poor quality of education. A culture of poverty is being transmitted down the generations, sacrificing human resources and impeding social mobility", McNamara said.

High fertility rates take a big toll on families, especially on the women who are forced to have too many children, too closely spaced. "The result is greater health risks and lost opportunities for both women and children", he said.

Siblings born less than two years apart are more likely to be sickly and to die; mothers, constantly pregnant or nursing infants, are "unable to play a larger role in the work force outside the home. This diminishes their occupational and economic status, which in turn reinforces the concept that males are more important. This makes sons more desirable than daughters. When only daughters are born, another pregnancy must ensue in order to try again for a son. Repeated pregnancy not only increases the family size, but exhausts the mother and weakens her health", McNamara added.

Women who are relegated to the single role of producing children are denied the basic human right of being able to make or share in "the most fundamental decision regarding their own lives. Family planning is an important means by which women can begin to enhance their role and status".

McNamara said that each developing country has "the opportunity to act now to establish - within broad limits - its future population growth and to set the rate of growth at levels that will maximize the welfare of both present and future generations".

Any country wanting to reduce fertility rates should focus on speeding up economic and social advancement with "particular emphasis on enhancing the status of women and reducing infant mortality". It should also introduce or expand comprehensive family planning programmes.

Among the strategies a country should adopt to improve economic and social advancement are increasing female literacy and improving the health of women and children.

To help reduce fertility rates, developing countries should

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emulate the actions of successful family planning programmes which include: offering a wide selection of services and contraceptive methods which meet the cultural needs and income levels of their populations; emphasizing the health benefits of family planning to both women and children; using both public and private sectors, government and non-government organizations to support the programmes; and, drawing on political leaders, especially at local levels, and religious leaders for support.

"In one major respect, the task for the decade ahead is far less difficult than it appears to be", he said. "Contraceptive prevalence rates rise when there is both a demand for services and a supply available", McNamara said.

"Fertility surveys indicate that a significant proportion of women have had unwanted births and that substantial numbers who wish to limit or space their children are not practising contraception", he added.

This "unmet demand" can be met by improving family planning services and contraceptive distribution, McNamara said. "It is estimated that this action alone would reduce population stabilization levels by about 2.2 billion".

The principal barrier to the success of an expanded global family planning programme now is the lack of financial resources, McNamara said. To raise the $8 billion in public funding for the global family planning programme by the year 2000 would require increases by the international donor community and the developing countries themselves, he said.

McNamara called for the developing countries to increase their financial support for family planning programmes from their 1990 levels of $3 billion to $4.5 billion by 2000. And he called on the international donor community to increase its funding from $800 million to approximately $3.5 billion, an amount in the year 2000 which would be "less than two-hundredths of 1 per cent of the total Gross National Product (GNP) of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and account for approximately 5 per cent of overseas development assistance (ODA)."

"Clearly, it is within the capabilities of the industrialized nations and the multilateral financial institutions to assist the developing countries to finance expanding family planning programmes," he said.

"Given the severity of the environmental and poverty problems facing the developing countries and the global community, reducing population growth rates below currently projected levels is a

necessary, humane and low-cost step that will contribute to their solution," McNamara said.

"Reducing fertility will allow political leaders more time to come to grips with the immense pressure building on natural resources, and it will permit Governments of developing countries to devote more resources to human development by increasing investment in education, health, welfare, and job creation," he added.